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LIBERALITY TO THE POOR,
AND THE
SICK RECOMMENDED.

A
SERMON:

PREACHED FOR THE BENEFIT

OF THE

*Manchester Infirmary, Dispensary,
Lunatic Hospital*

AND

Asylum,

In the DISSENTING CHAPEL in HORWICH,

APRIL 8. 1792.

BY GEORGE WATSON. *K*

THE BLESSING OF HIM THAT WAS READY TO PERISH
CAME UPON ME. JOB XXIX. 13.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following plain discourse, originally composed with no further view than to be delivered to a country congregation, is printed at the desire of many who heard it. The author ventures to publish it with the earnest desire, that he may thereby in some degree serve the cause of humanity. He is sensible that he needs, and therefore he solicits, the candour of his readers.

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HEBREWS XIII. 16.

*But to do good, and to communicate, forget not; for
with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

IT is generally supposed, by the learned, that this epistle to the Hebrews, was written by the apostle Paul; and we may just remark, in favour of this conclusion, that it is formed upon the same plan with those epistles which are unanimously allowed to be his. The author employs the former part of the epistle, in stating and illustrating the doctrines of the gospel; and the latter, in urging its precepts and exhortations: thus leading the people he addresses to practical religion, and rendering faith subservient to obedience. An useful lesson this, both to those who instruct, and those who are instructed.

In this last chapter, the apostle confines himself almost entirely to exhortation; and, among other things, strongly urges a hospitable, compassionate and liberal disposition. He begins with recommending brotherly love; and, in the next place, kindness to strangers; reminding the Hebrews of

the honour which God had conferred upon some of their ancestors, in consequence of their hospitality; "for thereby," saith he, "some have entertained angels unawares." This was especially the case with Abraham, to whom, it is probable, he particularly refers. In the next verse, he recommends compassion to the afflicted and persecuted; and, that they might not be backward to the exercise of this disposition, he puts them in mind of the peculiar care of divine providence employed in behalf of the people of God, verse 5th, "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." And after interspersing various precepts, to direct their general conduct, he returns to the subject of liberality and charity, in our text. But to do good, and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

It is worthy of remark, that the apostle thus addresses those christians, who, as we find in other parts of this epistle, had been violently persecuted and greatly impoverished; who, therefore could not, by any means be said to be wealthy; nay, who probably had little to spare from their own necessities; "for," he tells them, "ye had compassion on one in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods." Such as these

these he exhorts to a liberal disposition; and, if these were called to it, who is there that can say, I am free from the obligation? To whom among you may I not turn, and say, "but to do good, and to communicate forget not?" Who among you hath been so persecuted for righteousness' sake, as to be plundered and despoiled of his goods? God hath left you in the peaceable, and, it may be, the plentiful possession of them. The exhortation comes to you then, with additional weight; forget not to do good with what God hath given and continued to you, for with such sacrifices he is well pleased.

The apostle had been discoursing largely, in the former part of the epistle, concerning the sacrifices of the Jewish law; shewing that, as types and shadows they pointed to Christ, the great sacrifice for sin; and that being all accomplished in him, they were necessarily abolished: since they had no further use, they were to have no more place, in the church of God. But still, he informs us in the verse preceeding the text, that under the christian dispensation there are sacrifices, which it is our duty to offer, and which will be accepted and approved, when offered in simplicity and sincerity of soul, through Jesus Christ. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."

But though the praise of the lips, offered from the heart, is an acceptable sacrifice, through Jesus Christ; God further requires the sacrifice of a portion of our substance for the relief of our suffering fellow-creatures; and assures us that with this (supposing it be done from a right principle) he is well pleased.

By *doing good*, I suppose the text to mean, the performance of *any act* of kindness and assistance towards persons in distress; which duty is incumbent upon persons of every rank and condition in life; for there is no one, how poor soever he may be, who hath not an opportunity, at one time or other, of thus doing good. Mankind have such a mutual dependance upon each other, that all may need and all may afford, assistance and succour in distress. The other term, *to communicate*, may refer more particularly to that kind of relief, which arises from dispensing a portion of our substance, in money, food, physic or clothing to the poor: this latter view is especially suited to the present occasion.

It should ever be our concern to do good, and communicate to others, if it were only from the consideration of our own situation in the world, and the need of compassion we may ourselves one day experience. Who knows to what adverse
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and painful changes he may be subjected before he leaves the world? This seems to be the argument of the apostle in the third verse of this chapter, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them;" conceiving of yourself as in their situation, "and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body;" in a state where you are every hour, liable to need the same compassionate remembrance from others, which their situation at present, claims from you.

But we are under higher obligations to the duty recommended in the text. We are to consider what God hath done for us, and what he righteously requires of us. The God of providence hath placed some in a larger sphere of usefulness than others; hath not only given them greater natural abilities, a better understanding and capacity, but a larger portion of this world's good; what will more than supply their own necessities. And why hath he done this, but that they may supply the necessities of others, considering themselves as the stewards of his providential favours to their inferiors? Why doth God give the power to do good, but that men should use it to that purpose?

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It should seem, however, by the manner of expression in the text, that those who have the power to do good and to communicate, are in great danger of forgetting this use of their possessions; for the apostle seems to warn christians against a *forgetfulness*; a neglect or omission of this duty, for want of due consideration. Whether this be the precise idea intended to be conveyed by the text or not, it is no improbable supposition that this may happen. It is no new thing, for persons in prosperity, to forget their fellow-creatures in adversity, even when they have been under some special obligation to remember and relieve them. And it is possible this neglect has not proceeded so much from insensibility, or ingratitude, as inattention.

A continual flow of health and spirits, and an increasing tide of riches and pleasure, charm the heart away from scenes of sorrow. The mind hath no time nor disposition to look into the abodes of mourning, sickness and want. These scenes are conceived of as disturbers of the peace, or a check to the pursuits of such a man. But surely this temper is highly displeasing to God. To forget the proper purpose for which God hath prospered us, to forget those who languish and are ready to perish for want of a small pittance
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of our abundance, is the most likely way to provoke God to withdraw his favours from us, and give them to those who will use them better; or what is more to be dreaded, he may leave us to fill up the measure of our folly and sin, to drown ourselves in perdition and destruction.

There is a sort of insolence and triumph in that prosperity, which causes men to forget the sons and daughters of affliction, which is highly displeasing in the sight of a holy God. And yet how much is squandered away to gratify folly and excess, which those who are ready to perish, need and implore in vain! A woe is denounced by the prophet Amos, against such as drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.* The passage seems to allude to the story of Joseph and the chief butler of Pharaoh, who were confined in the same prison. Joseph, by interpreting the dream of the butler, foretold his restoration to the favour of the king; and added, "but think on me when it is well with thee, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house." But we are afterwards told, that the chief butler did not

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* Amos vi. 6.

remember Joseph, but forgot him; § he was not grieved for his affliction.

I am far from charging you, my Brethren, with this ungodly prosperity, this thoughtless dissipation, which banishes every benevolent and charitable sentiment from the breast, and causes mankind (to speak in the mildest terms) *to forget* to do good and to communicate. But it might be profitable, when you are tempted to indulge your appetites beyond what nature requires, to think thus with yourselves, “How many of my sick and helpless fellow-creatures are now suffering for want of what I am going to throw away, to gratify intemperance and produce disease? How shall I answer for this to him, who hath given me more than my necessities require, that I may have to give to him that needeth? I will now save the expence of these indulgences; I will devote it to the use of him that is poor and friendless; it shall contribute to heal the sick, to feed the hungry or clothe the naked.” This is a resolution worthy of a man and a christian; it would shew that you had not forgotten “to do good and to communicate;” it would be doing good to others, and preventing evil to yourselves. And O my friends,

friends, if every man upon the borders of excess were thus to reason and to act, how many of the sons and daughters of affliction would find relief, who now suffer, and perhaps perish, for want of it? If you will be sober, diligent and prudent, you may be charitable; and if you are pious, you will be so. I would not have any shew that they are none of these, by shutting their hands and turning away their eyes, when applied to upon this occasion. Let me be understood, however, to mean here only such as have something to spare of their own, and not of another's in trust; for to give that which is not our own, may rather be called robbery than charity. To all such, however, as can honestly spare a part of their property (and it is to be hoped there are few or none here who cannot) the text is addressed "to do good, and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Hitherto I have argued in favour of a liberal and compassionate disposition, from our mutual relation and dependance; from the nature and frequency of our necessities. But I would now proceed to mention what is, and I trust will appear to you, a stronger inducement to this temper and conduct, than any thing I have yet offered; and that is the obligation which the word of God, and particularly the precepts and example

of Christ, lay upon you to exercise compassion to the necessitous. The spirit of the gospel is liberal, generous and charitable. This spirit it breathes in almost every page, enforcing it by the noblest motives, and the most endearing considerations. Let us attend a little to them.

It is remarked by the apostle Peter, concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, "that he went about doing good;"* and that this was his character every one must acknowledge who reads the history of his life. He did not do good indeed with money; for we do not find that he ever abounded in wealth; but he distributed a kind of bounty which was better than gold, and which, in many cases, gold could not purchase. He loosed the tongue of the dumb; he opened the ears of the deaf, and the eyes of the blind; he caused the lame to walk; he cleansed the lepers; he healed the various diseases of the sick; yea, raised the dead to life again. All these things Christ performed from motives of pity; for we are told that he was moved with compassion, when he perceived the diseases, the ignorance, and even the hunger of the multitude; and in all these cases he afforded them immediate relief. And I would

* Acts x. 38.

would ask, whether you can be the disciples of such a Master, and refuse to contribute to the relief of those who are sick and destitute, when it is in the power of your hand to do it?

We know how the example, the doctrines and precepts of their Master operated upon the first disciples of Christ, when religion appeared in its greatest purity and power. Though in general poor and persecuted, those of them who had more, contributed to those who had less. Indeed it would be endless to cite examples and precepts upon this subject from the new Testament.

We are told upon the first setting up of the christian church after the day of Pentecost, that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, neither said any of them that ought of the things that he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."* And, upon hearing of the distresses which were coming upon their brethren in Judea, the disciples of Christ at Antioch unanimously agreed to send them relief. "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren who dwelt in Judea."† We see how prevalent

* Acts iv. 32.

† xi. 29.

lent the same spirit was among the apostles, from what St. Paul saith of his conference with Peter, and James, and John. After it was mutually agreed among them, what department each of them should take in propagating the gospel, they were unanimous in their resolution of cultivating and promoting a liberal disposition. "Only they would," saith he, "that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do."||

It would be easy to enlarge upon the many precepts of the new Testament, which enjoin this disposition to do good and to communicate; but the limits of this discourse only allow the mention of a very few of them. A very remarkable passage to our purpose occurs in the apostle's farewell discourse to the elders of Ephesus, wherein he reminds them of the duty which he had often inculcated upon them; you will find it in Acts xx. 35. "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring, ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive." We do not find these words in any of our Lord's discourses; but they seem to have been treasured up in the memory of the disciples, as worthy to be

be handed down to posterity; and there can be no doubt, from the spirit which prevailed among them, that they remembered them in a practical manner. And if we remember and believe them too, we shall not refuse to help those who are in affliction and distress.

It seems to have been the practice of the christian church, in the apostolic age, to make frequent collections for the poor. The apostle Paul recommends a settled plan to the church of Corinth for this purpose. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders in the churches of Galatia, even so do ye; upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."* Nor was the charity of the first christians confined to the saints, or those of their own communion, for they were commanded to do good as they had opportunity unto all men; even to their enemies: "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;" nor can we deny that these precepts are equally obligatory upon ourselves. If you, then, have any reverence for the authority of the scriptures; if you so love Christ as to keep his commandments,

* 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

mandments, you will yield to the emotions of pity upon this occasion; for if any man hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shatteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? §

Christians are under the strongest obligations to be charitable to the poor and needy. They have more forcible motives than others set before them. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich." Do you not call yourselves the disciples, the followers, and imitators of Christ? If you be so indeed, this consideration will have its weight with you; the remembrance of Christ's compassion, will render you compassionate; you will view yourselves, not as your own, but as bought with the price of a Redeemer's blood, and therefore bound to consecrate all you have and all you are to his will; which evidently requires you to do good unto all men as you have opportunity.

You believe in the word of God, and consequently in his providence; and he hath said to them

them that follow his will, that venture upon his word, in the way of their duty, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Let the unbeliever, then, who looks no further nor higher than the present state, say, "If I give any thing to the poor it will be lost and gone from me for ever, and I shall so far expose myself to poverty." This cannot be the sentiment of any christian; it is rather that of an atheist, a man without God in the world. I hope better things of you. "Cast thy bread upon the waters," saith the wise man, "and thou shalt find it after many days."* Yea, our Lord carries your hopes further, "thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just."†

But, possibly, an avaricious disposition is suggesting; such an evasion as the following. "If I had greater wealth, I could afford to bestow a trifle; but though I am improving my circumstances, they are yet far from being affluent; if I should contribute any thing, it would lessen my savings, and retard my progress in the way to be rich." Hear what our Lord saith to every one who inclines to such a selfish disposition. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. || Lay not up for yourselves treasures

* Eccles. xi. 1. † Luke xiv. 14. || Luke xii. 15.

treasures upon earth, where moth and dust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. * Make unto yourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." § Listen not to the voice of covetousness, but sacrifice it; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Do not think, however, that doing good from *any* motive is well pleasing to God; you might give all your goods to feed the poor, and, not having charity, be nothing in his sight. Your generosity to the poor must proceed from love to God and your fellow-creatures, in order to its being acceptable. But, on the other hand, a refusal to part with any thing to relieve the necessities of a fellow-creature in distress, when you have more than you need, when you can spare it out of the conveniencies, and perhaps, out of the superfluities of life, is a symptom of that selfish, sordid spirit, which the gospel utterly condemns; for we are told that the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Possibly some of you may feel yourselves unwilling to bestow any thing in proportion to your abilities upon this occasion, not so much because you desire to accumulate money, as to spend it in
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* Matt. vi. 19. § Luke xvi. 9.

the gratification of appetite, fancy or passion; and upon this ground will plead that your own wants ought to be first supplied. But endeavour, my Brethren, to make a distinction between real and imaginary wants. To the former neither God nor man forbid you to attend; but the latter admit of no excuse, when set in competition with the necessities of the afflicted.

Enquire then impartially into the nature of those wants which you are inclined, at all events, to supply. The wants of nature are but few, and easily supplied; but those of intemperance, pride and dissipation, admit of no bounds; the more they are indulged, the more importunate and extravagant are their claims. And think whether, at the end of life, it will afford you more satisfaction to reflect that you have lived to yourselves alone, or that you have consecrated your talents to the glory of God and the good of men. It would surely afford some alleviation to the afflictions of Job, that he could say concerning the days of his prosperity, "I was a father to the poor, and the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me."†

But it may be asked, is it an object of charity which you are recommending?

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† Job xxix. 13. 16.

I shall now endeavour to answer that question in the affirmative. For my own part, I think there are few cases which solicit our assistance with stronger evidences in their favour. In many cases we may be applied to for our charitable assistance, and see room to suspect that we may be imposed upon; that our money is in danger of being employed to maintain the idle and dishonest, rather than to feed the hungry, and relieve the unfortunate. But what objection of this kind can there be in the present case? Here is an institution, formed and established for the express purpose of receiving and providing for poor people who fall sick, and are in such circumstances that they cannot pay a physician or surgeon to attend them. They can but just provide, for themselves and their families, daily bread, in a time of health; consequently, in sickness, even that fails; and they are in danger of perishing, for want of proper diet and physic. It may be, they want the most common conveniences of life; many of them being confined to close, dirty rooms, or damp and unwholesome cellars; and the best relief they can get, the scanty allowance of a parish, is very inadequate to their urgent wants. Others, it may be, are sick in a strange land, having scarcely a friend within the distance of some hundreds of miles. But, by the charity which solicits your assistance this day, multitudes

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of these poor creatures, labouring under all the varieties of disease, want and woe, are provided with the best accommodations; with open airy rooms, where every thing is conducted with order and cleanliness; where the best medical assistance is provided; where men of the first character for skill in their profession, willingly afford their assistance, without fee or reward. Here the poor stranger finds a home, in the hour of his greatest calamity; and every thing is done, which human power can do, to restore him, and send him back in health and strength to his former employment, by which he may procure an honest and independent subsistence.—Here the poor who have met with those painful, dangerous accidents to which we are all liable, are immediately admitted.—Here they make the broken bone to rejoice, and bind up the bleeding and otherwise mortal wound.—Here, too, that most deplorable disorder, lunacy or madness, finds an asylum and a refuge. Those who must otherwise be the continual grief and terror of their friends, are properly confined, and treated in the manner that is best calculated to restore them to their right mind; and, even while they continue as they are, their situation is rendered as comfortable as their disorder will allow. Can it be at all disputed whether such an institution is useful or not? Need it be asked if any
good

good be likely to be done by contributing towards its support?

Here is little room for imposture. In common cases, those who are sent to partake of these charities, are recommended by the annual subscribers, who frequently know something of their general character; and whatever their character or conduct may have been, it will be soon known, by sending them to the Infirmary, whether their disorder be real or not. Men of the greatest skill in their profession cannot be imposed upon by pretended tales of sickness; not to say that many of the patients who are sent, labour under disorders which it requires no skill in physick or surgery to perceive, are cases of real distress and urgent danger.

Nor is this the only consideration with which these charities come recommended to our regard. A person, who desires to do good by relieving the poor, especially in sickness, which is the season in which they stand most in need, cannot do it with so much advantage as by contributing to an Infirmary. Any sum of money will go perhaps ten times as far in this way, as the same will when laid out in providing for the cure of a poor sick person in a private way: I mean supposing him to have

have the same advantages and conveniencies provided for him at home. The attendance of the physician or surgeon must then be paid for; besides which, many other conveniencies must be procured, which none in a state of absolute poverty possess. But in the other case, the skill of the ablest physicians and surgeons is bestowed gratis; and we may further assert, that every article of a medicinal nature, is there procured at the lowest price, and the best of the kind provided; to which we may add, that medicines purchased in large quantities to supply a great number of patients, need not any part of them be lost. Thus have I laid before you a fair state of the case, to prove that the present object hath a claim upon your liberality. There seems no room for a pretence that it doth not deserve your regard, or that there is not even the strongest probability that you will be instrumental, in proportion as you contribute, to do good.

There is but one question more to be answered, and that is this: do these charities, allowing them to be highly beneficial to the public, need our assistance? Have not the managers of them enough already in their hands to answer the purposes designed by them? An answer to this question must rest upon the state of the case, as
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many of you have seen it published in the newspapers. By these accounts (the authenticity of which, there is not the smallest reason to doubt) it appears that, through the prodigious increase of inhabitants in MANCHESTER and its neighbourhood, and the growing reputation of the management of the Infirmary, Dispensary, Lunatic Hospital and Asylum, the number of patients hath exceedingly increased within the last few years; no less than 1178 more patients were admitted in the last year, than in any preceeding one; the whole number amounting to 6021. On this account it was found necessary to erect new buildings, attending with a considerable expence; and it is easy to conceive, that an additional expenditure in other respects, must follow such an extraordinary increase of patients. These circumstances have, in a great degree, exhausted the funds raised for the support of these charities, and have rendered it necessary for the managers to solicit the assistance of the public at large; and with these solicitations the public seem inclined chearfully to comply. I hope you will not dissent from the public voice. To be singular in some cases is an honour; but in this it would be a disgrace. It may be some now here, or at least some of their dear friends and relatives, have experienced the benefit of these charities; and

and many more may need that assistance, which so many have already enjoyed, from this wise and benevolent plan for the relief of the poor, in the time of their greatest necessity.

I shall conclude in the words of the apostle to the Corinthians. "But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully; every man, according as he hath purposed in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a chearful giver; and God is able to make all grace abound, toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work.—Now he that ministereth seed to the sower, both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness."

Amen.

THE END.

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he shall be enriched in every way, so that he
shall have abundance of all things, and he shall
be able to give to all things abundantly. Now he
which ministereth to the lower seed, ministereth
unto his own seed, and himself will feed him;
he which ministereth to the upper seed, ministereth
unto the life of the world." — 1 Cor. ix. 6.

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